

# Solidarity, Kindness and Joy Amidst the Pandemic

*This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before the discussion questions.*

## Lesson Goals

Help students:

- see how simple, random acts of kindness can have a significant positive effect on others, on ourselves, and how they can build solidarity and unity with others.
- see how generous acts can be celebrating the accomplishments of others and bringing joy to others.
- practice greater empathy in trying to understand the challenges many people are facing who are negatively affected by the coronavirus.
- see how there are likely still aspects of our lives that we can be grateful for, even during challenging times.
- see how by giving of ourselves during challenging times we can attain a greater sense of joy and fulfillment.
- generate ideas for what they can do within their homes, school, neighborhoods and among their peers to assist, bring comfort, joy and to establish unity with others.

## Primary Virtues / Character Traits

**Empathy:** trying to understand another person's situation, entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation

**Generosity:** giving freely of our own possessions, time and/or talent

**Kindness:** caring for others and living it out by helping others and coming into union with others. A caring person lives with empathy in trying to understand another person's position, compassion in desiring to help others and generosity in giving of ourselves and taking action to help others.

**Gratitude:** being thankful; appreciating the kindness and all good things that other people, organizations and our communities have given to us

**Solidarity:** unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

**Creativity:** the ability to think of new ideas; to come up with new approaches for accomplishing a goal or solving a problem

## Leader Introduction

Chances are this year has been very different for most of us than we expected. The coronavirus pandemic has caused many schools to go virtual, student sports leagues to cancel their season, businesses to shut down, graduations to cancel and birthday celebrations to be canceled or scaled back. However difficult these times are, there are fortunately still reasons to hope. There are people coming together with a loving heart and helping hand. Scientists are working on a vaccine for the coronavirus, doctors and nurses are caring for those who are sick and everyday heroes, people like you and me are reaching out to others with kind and generous acts. In today's lesson, we will meet some of these heroes. Our first heroes are Lily and Tony, a married immigrant couple from Brooklyn New York who have sacrificed a great deal to help those in need.

**#1 Video on NY Dry Cleaner Couple making masks for their community to stay safe**  
<https://abc7ny.com/face-masks-coronavirus-brooklyn-nyc-dry-cleaners/6118464/>

Our next hero is Bruce Johnson. Bruce is a sanitation worker, a man who keeps the streets clean, and his neighbors loved and celebrated. (**Play Second Video**)

**#2 Video on Sanitation Serenade:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1qf1JfkVhg>

## Leader Summary

In a time when often we feel we are further apart (at least 6 feet apart specifically!), Lily, Tony and Bruce's acts of kindness show us how we can bring together people of different cultures, ethnicities and economic classes. Their stories also inspire us to be thoughtful and generous with our actions, and also to stay positive and celebrate even while suffering with our own personal challenges and losses. We all have opportunities to be a light to others and bring joy to ourselves at the same time... and no lockdown can stop us from caring for others and building unity.

**Discussion Question Options** (*discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses or bullet points if needed*)

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions - included within the online lesson as a separate document.

1. Let's practice the virtue of **empathy** and try to place ourselves in the position of Bruce, and the students he serenaded?

Bruce lost two of his daughters in a car accident. As Bruce was driving by the two students trying to celebrate their graduation. How do you think he likely felt, and how do you think you would feel in that position?

(Sadness for not being able to be with his own daughters and celebrate the accomplishments in their lives; possibly even anger that his daughters were taken from him)

What does it say about Bruce and the virtues that he lives out that he was able to overcome these likely negative emotions and instead serenade the graduating high school girls?

(Bruce is an extremely kind person in having empathy for the girls and then being exceptionally generous in sharing his time and talent for singing to help bring joy to the girls.)

The high school girls were likely disappointed in many ways that they weren't able to have a normal graduation. How do you think Bruce's actions made them feel?  
(valued, reassured, celebrated, joyful)

2. What advice did Bruce offer to the girls?  
(work hard to achieve your goals, celebrate and be joyful about your accomplishments)
3. Now let's place ourselves into the position of Tony and Lily. Remember they are immigrants who came to America for opportunity, worked hard over years to build their own business and send their children to college. Now due to a pandemic, they have lost most of their business. What emotions do you think they first experienced as the pandemic spread and their business declined? (sadness and anger that this is happening to them for no fault of their own; fear of losing their business, paying their rent and being able to provide for their family; stress)

What virtues did Tony and Lily live out in their decision to focus on helping others in their neighborhood by making masks and giving them away for free instead of focusing on their suffering?

(**kindness** and **generosity** in caring for the people of their neighborhood and freely giving of their time and talents to help others; **Courage** in being willing to offer their masks for free)

4. Let's now talk about how the kindness and generosity that Bruce, Tony and Lily expressed for others likely affected their own feelings and attitudes, even as they were suffering from significant disappointments and losses. How do you think their actions of kindness affected their own attitude?  
(**fulfilment** and **joy** that comes from helping others; **gratitude** that they are able to help others; hope for a better future. Bruce was able to rejoice in his daughters' memories by celebrating other young women who are accomplishing beautiful things.)
5. Let's read over the definition of **solidarity**. How are the stories of Bruce, Lily and Tony, their actions and the responses of the people they helped examples of solidarity?

(Each of their acts of **kindness brought together people from different races, ethnicities and economic positions**. In both cases the people receiving and giving the help come from different races and ethnicities, yet all have become unified through acts of kindness. Lily and Tony through the desire to be safe and Bruce by the desire to celebrate accomplishment and to share joy.)

6. Let's talk about acts of kindness that we can do-- small, large and especially creative ones-- that can help others during this time of stress due to the coronavirus? These acts can be within our own families, among our friends, within our school or larger community. Let's key up some ideas for each of these areas of our lives one at a time, including examples of kindness that we have already seen or experienced. [A version of this is an extended activity below.](#)
7. Do you think acts of kindness within our school and larger community can help build solidarity in fostering unity among groups that are now divided from each other? Let's talk about specific examples that we have seen or experienced, as well as new ideas that we can actually live out. [A version of this is an extended activity below.](#)
8. How is **gratitude** shown by the different people in the stories?  
(Lily and Tony are grateful for our country for giving them the opportunity to improve their lives and grateful for their community supporting their business. Their community is grateful for their sacrifice and producing masks for them. Bruce is grateful for the opportunity to see young women graduate and to connect with the memory of his daughters. The girls are grateful that Bruce took time to brighten their day and share his story)

Do you think we can do this in our lives by focusing on the good things that we have and helping others, even while we are struggling with a challenge? What are some examples of things we typically have that we can be thankful for?  
(the opportunity to learn, health, family members who care about us, friends)

### Journal Writing Options

1. Write about how the pandemic has affected you and your family. Write about both the realities of how it has changed your daily life and also about your feelings.
2. Write about at least one way that you want to live out a good aspect of the stories of Bruce and / or Lily and Tony. Think about kindness, generosity, gratitude and solidarity.
3. Bruce was **creative** in coming up with the idea of singing, “The Greatest Love of All” by Whitney Houston to the young women to cheer them up. Lily and Tony **creatively** began changing what they do at their business from cleaning clothes to making masks for others. Jot down your thoughts about how creativity and art can bring joy to us during this pandemic. Write about one idea that would be a new or different way that you could do to help someone else during the pandemic.

### Extended Activities:

1. Organize students into 4 teams and have each team brainstorm ways that they can bring joy and acts of kindness within one of four communities: peers, family, school, larger community in a way that follows social distancing recommendations. Each team should present their ideas to the group as a whole.

Have your group then vote on which idea they think would be the most effective in making a real difference and then also which idea is the most creative.

2. As a follow-up to the above activity, ask each student to enact an act of kindness and / or solidarity, especially one that is **creative**, within their family, among their peers, within school or larger community. During the next week ask students to share their experiences both good and bad – what worked well, what fell flat, what was the response of the person / people they were helping or connecting with, and what examples of unity and solidarity came from them. Encourage within these discussions a willingness to laugh about flops and the willingness to be creative and try new things.

# Character Action Media

*Connecting Virtues to Our World*

[www.characteractionmedia.com](http://www.characteractionmedia.com)

Current Links in Education

Copyright 2016